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I, who used to stay up very late, both to do my stint at guard duty and to take advantage of a few uninterrupted hours for study, used to take up a stand close to them. At first my presence there made them keep quiet, but later on, taking heart at my reiterated hiss tzilataj ("very pretty"), and seeing that I did not make fun of them, they continued in spite of my being there.

At last, after twenty days, the sick man got well.

One of the very strange treatments is the one which they ad- 752
minister to those who have been poisoned by a sting ray, which fish can administer an extremely painful and sometimes mortal wound. This treatment consists in placing the offended part, which is usually the ankle, over the smoke given off from the cracks in burning palo santo [lignum vital --Translator], which is a resinous wood, after which a woman in her menstruating period is to sit astride it. I have been assured by whites who have made the experiment that it is a very efficacious remedy.

Every treatment for sickness or wounds however needs, if it 756
is to have any virtue, to be in the hands of a witch doctor (male), or at least in those of a female witch doctor.

Not everyone can be a witch doctor, and just as the members of this profession make their patients pay according to the seriousness of the malady and the means of the individual, either in skins, animals, food or other things, so also does this profession have its seamy side in which quarrels and deception occur. In addition to this and in order to get greater prestige they shroud themselves in mystery and the supernatural. So it is that in the village of Granadero the Indians, speaking about a young man who was already embarked on this career, said that as a boy he had vanished and then reappeared after two years which he had spent underground among the a'hot, these a'hot having carried him off in order to instruct him in the art and imbue him with the virtues of doctor and priest.

While on the subject of these frauds I must tell of an occasion when things almost took a bad turn for me. I went to call on 123
Chief Granadero who was just recovering from a long illness. I 755
had with me, as is my custom, a pocket inkwell and a pen. Granadero noticed these things and asked me what they were. I, thinking to please him flourished the inkwell and pen and set about writing, but saw in a moment that Granadero had become furious and menacing -- his doctors had just cured him of the a'hot which

2: Karsten E-5 (1911-1913)1932 SI7 Mataco SI7

776 The second class of spirits are called *nahút*. They are the most feared
761 because they are believed to cause death, the phenomenon most feared by primitive man. Being particularly death demons, the *nahút* are frequently called *nahút yil*. *Yil* is the Mataco word for death. Every death is due to a special *nahút yil*, and of course every mortal disease, or every disease which naturally ends in death unless the art of the medicine-man can prevent it. If one asks a Mataco Indian what a *nahút* is like, he will answer that it is a thin, shadow-like human figure; it is the double of the dead man. The *nahút* live in the earth, where the dead are interred, but they frequently leave this dwelling-place and fly through the air, approach the habitations of the living and inflict mortal disease upon them.

753 Every grave disease is due to a special *nahút*. Thus for instance,
776 the intermittent fever which attacks people during the cold season, is caused by a *nahút telàh*. The Mataco, however, are of opinion that it is
[755] possible for a medicine-man to cure the patient by incantations in four or five days. The worst *nahút* of all is the small-pox, *otoahtyá*, a disease which has caused terrible ravages among the Mataco at different periods. The art of the medicine-man is powerless against this dreadful demon. Therefore, when an epidemic of small-pox breaks out in a Mataco village the inhabitants know of no other remedy against the evil than to burn the whole village, to abandon the place and the sick ones, and to depart to another place. When an Indian is attacked by the small-pox, the Mataco told me, the *nahút* seizes the patient at the throat and presses it together with such violence that the tongue hangs out from the mouth, the eyes are thrust out from their orbits, the face swells up, and the patient dies.

If in a village, during a certain time, several deaths have occurred, especially if an epidemic has been raging, the Mataco are in the habit of saying: »That place has been visited by many *nahút yil*». On the other hand, if in a certain village there has been no death and no disease for a long time, the Indians say: »In this place there are, at present, no *nahút yil*». There is practically no disease and no illness which is not directly or indirectly ascribed by the Indians either to an *aittáh slamsa* or a *nahút yil*. Slight disorders and illnesses which are cured in a couple of days are ascribed to the *aittáh*, mortal diseases to the *nahút*. If a Mata-
[752] co for instance breaks his leg, or if some other misfortune happens to him which does not end fatally, he is of opinion that he has been attacked by
776 a »small» *aittáh*. Similarly, there are *aittáh* operating in stupendous natural
821 phenomena, in hurricanes, in torrential rains, in thunder and lightning,

3: Metraux E-5 (1933) 1939 SI7 Mataco SI7

IX. Storms

821 761 When a storm approaches with rain and thunder, little children's ears are to be covered each time the thunder crashes, otherwise Rain would take them under his arm and carry them away to his house. When such a thing happens, the child's body, which has remained on earth, becomes lean and white and all the food he takes is of no use. He visibly pines away, and it is not likely that a medicine-man can cure him. He will finally die without the cause of his death being known. The rain cannot do anything to grown-ups or big children, for it has not the strength to carry them away, [841] but it can harm menstruating women who happen to be out during a storm. Then they get very feeble.

X. Shooting Stars

821 781 Shooting stars foretell the death of someone. Meteors are stones thrown by the rain in order to fell the *quebracho*.

XI. Treatment of Snake Bites

752 825 When a serpent bites a man, it goes into the wound and climbs up in his body. When a man's foot is bitten by a snake the leg must be pressed starting from the thigh, squeezing down to the place where he has been bitten. In so doing, the snake which has already had time to enter the leg, is obliged to go down into the big toe where it rolls itself up, tired. The operation lasts from evening to dawn and when the sun appears the snake gets cramped and vanishes under the ground. Once the snake is out the medicine-man has to suck the wound, for the departing snake has left its skin inside the body of the victim. The patient is completely cured only when the last piece of skin left by the snake has been removed. Otherwise he remains sick, has a headache and gets thinner and thinner.

If the progress of the snake inside the body cannot be stopped, the animal may go up into the head and blind the victim. It also goes to the heart and after repeated bites

3. Metraux E-5 (1933) 1939 SI7 Mataco SI7

may kill him. The snake's *āhat* is called *punsoya* (perhaps Spanish-ponzoña : poison).

When a man is bitten by a snake he must kill the reptile and take it home in order to be cured rapidly. If he has been bitten while away from his home, he must dig a groove and put the snake into it, facing it in the opposite direction to that which he is taking. Thus the snake cannot enter him.

Tawkwax taught the men the procedure to be followed in order to cure snake bites.

XII. How to Become a Singer

Those who want to become good singers must go to the bush and stay there for quite a long time. They must kill birds who are good singers and eat them after they have been made into powder and mixed with blood extracted from the arm. When they are in the bush they must first beat a drum, then run. Thus they will perhaps dream about a singing bird. When they wake up they must then take their drums and sing the song they heard in their dreams. One must not awaken until the song is finished or he will not remember it. Everyone has two songs and he must sing them every day in order to learn them. Ordinarily several young men go to the bush and after they have dreamed of a song they sing one after another. Generally three or four days are sufficient to master a song.

One must not sing someone else's song. If after one has eaten a bird he dreams of an iguana, it is no longer worth while to go on, for he will never become a good singer. The birds one dreams about and who teach one how to sing are not ordinary birds, they are *paata* (supernatural beings). The women do not know how to sing but they can cry when they have to mourn. Not all women know how to weep. In order to weep well, a woman must dream about another woman who is a good mourner. There are some exceptional women who can sing.

3: Metraux E-5 (1933) 1939 SI7 Mataco SI7

of their dreams. My informant, having dreamed that he was planting sugar-cane, intended to grow some.

Through the soul one knows what is going to happen. For instance, if one dreams that he shall be killed, it is likely that he is to die an unnatural death. If he is traveling about and dreams of home it is better to turn back. A man who is away from his wife can talk to her in the evening and she will see him in her dreams. It is the soul which walks about during the night. If one dreams of an algarroba or that he is working in a field, it means that he has still a long time to live. If during the absence of a member of the group someone dies, the absent one will dream about the dead person who appears to him naked. Generally when a traveler returns to his village there is no need to tell him of what has happened during his absence, for he is informed of everything through his dreams which occur when his soul returns to his family. Very often in dreams one sees dead relatives. The soul has gone to the underworld and paid them a visit. Sometimes the dead return by night to the houses of the living who then dream of the departed.

b) *Remedies*

The Indians call a certain fungus *āxǫ̈tëut*. According to them it is the excrement of the fox which towards morning transforms itself into a fungus. It is used as a remedy for scalding. A fragment of the plant is toasted, powdered, mixed with fat and the white of an egg and spread on the burned place. The fat and the egg white are desirable but not indispensable ingredients for in a pinch the toasted powder is sufficient. This same plant sometimes obturates the penis of a sick person and prevents him from urinating. If when sucking the sick man the medicine-man gets out a fragment of this plant it most certainly means that the patient will recover. When the extremity of a limb aches it is to be tied at intervals of about half an

3: Metraux E-5 (1933) 1939 SI7 Mataco SI7

inch; there the punctures are to be made until the blood flows. If a first treatment proves insufficient it must be repeated until loss of blood relieves congestion and eases the limb.

To stop a hemorrhage one must burn an old hat or some old rag and put the ashes on the wound. When one is pricked by a thorn one must suck the blood to prevent inflammation.

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843 from a certain tuber which has been roasted and then ground in a mortar. The husband unties his belt and undoes the knot in his tie so that the umbilical cord not wrap itself about the child's neck.

844 Only on rare occasions are there any complications at birth. According to the observations of a medical missionary, Doctor Collins Smith, labor lasts about two [sic] hours for the first child and around four or five hours for the others. A delivery often gathers a numerous crowd, and the neighbors take up positions close to the woman who is in labor, without showing any particular interest, but ready to take part should it be necessary to render any assistance. Old women, greatly experienced, come to assist the woman in labor, especially if the delivery is a difficult one. These benevolent matrons
431 usually receive a gift--a goat or a piece of cloth--by way of payment for their trouble.

The pregnant woman who is about to deliver is placed on the thighs of one of these crones, who is seated cross-legged on the ground. She takes hold, with both hands, of a pole which is stuck vertically into the earth in front of her and grips it firmly as the pains become greater. Other informants have told me that women give birth to their babies in a squatting position directly onto the ground; but they confirmed the matter of the use of a rod or pole stuck into the earth. If the labor is difficult or longer than is usual, one of the matrons presses the body of the uterus with her hands as would a doctor wishing to expulse the plancenta mechanically. If the woman in labor is unable to keep her sitting position, she lies down in such a manner that one of the helpers may rest her knee against the perineum, while another woman massages her in the uterine region.

Any mishap which may occur in the process is [10] attributed to witchcraft or to the husband's negligence who may have violated one of the numerous "tabus" which he is obliged to observe.

The umbilical cord is cut with a knife. It is never cut before the appearance of the placenta, as a child's life is not complete until his placenta has been expelled. According to one of my informants
[752] the navel wound is cauterized with an incandescent pumpkin stalk. If the placenta is long in coming, the women exert upon the abdomen the same type of pressure used to accelerate the baby's birth. The placenta is buried without any kind of ceremony. The umbilical cord is dried and put into a little leather bag in the shape of a rhomboid, which the child carries about his neck until he is ten years old.